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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000484

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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ FILLS IN PSUV PARTY STRUCTURE

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT RICHARD DOWNES,
REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

¶11. (C) Summary. After months of infighting and organizational difficulties, and more than a year after President Chavez announced its creation, PSUV leaders finally sought official National Electoral Commission (CNE) recognition of the PSUV on April 2. President Chavez, who is also president of the PSUV, recently named party loyalists to head up key committees of his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and to serve as regional Vice Presidents for the party. In the coming days, the PSUV national steering committee will select local state party leaders from a list of nominations forwarded by local PSUV "battalion" leaders. Even PSUV members privately concede that Chavez' single pro-government party is suffering from "growing pains." Chavez continues to promote top-down management of his purportedly grassroots political party, to rely on a small trusted circle of politicians, and blur the distinction between party and state. End Summary.

PSUV Formalizing Its Political Status

¶12. (SBU) Former Information Minister William Lara visited the National Electoral Council (CNE) on April 2 to register Chavez' United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) as a formal political party. Lara and other PSUV leaders publicly reaffirmed that Chavez' former Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) party no longer exists. Chavez intended the PSUV to be the single pro-government party, but after the defeat of his constitutional reform package in the December 2007 referendum, Chavez said the PSUV is prepared to enter into election alliances with pro-Chavez parties that declined to join the PSUV. PSUV leaders held an initial meeting with leaders of Patria Para Todos (PPT) and the Communist Party (PCV) on April 3 to try to forge a joint strategy for the November state and local elections.

Chavez Selects Loyalists for PSUV Positions

¶13. (SBU) At a March 29 rally of local PSUV leaders, President Chavez named loyal supporters to key PSUV positions, including a number of party stalwarts that did not win one of the 15 PSUV Steering Committee seats in internal party

elections (Reftel). For example, Chavez named Dario Vivas to head the party's Mobilization Committee, former Information Minister William Lara to lead the Electoral Committee, and former Finance Minister Rodrigo Cabezas to direct the Finance Committee. Some members of the PSUV steering committee will also head national committees, including National Assembly member Noheli Pocaterra (International Affairs), government talk show (VTV) broadcaster Vanessa Davies (Publicity) and former Ambassador to Cuba Ali Rodriguez (Ideology). Justice and Interior Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin and former Vice President Jorge Rodriguez will head up a Public Administration Committee for PSUV-government coordination.

¶4. (SBU) At the same rally, Chavez also named 10 loyalists as regional party Vice Presidents. He named Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello to head up Miranda and Guarico States. Top PSUV steering committee vote-getter and former Education Minister Aristobulo Isturiz will lead the PSUV in Caracas and Vargas State. The President's brother, Education Minister Adan Chavez, will lead the PSUV in Apure and Barinas states. Ali Rodriguez will not only head up the Ideology Committee, but is a party VP for the western states of Tachira, Merida, and Trujillo. Similarly, Finance Committee Chairman Rodrigo Cabezas is VP for Zulia and Falcon states. Justice and Interior Minister Rodriguez Chacin is the party VP for Nueva Esparta, Monagas, and Sucre states. Organizing the PSUV party into 10 regions (vice 23 states) is consistent with Chavez' proposal to change the political geography of Venezuela, part of his proposed constitutional reform package that voters turned down in the December 2007 referendum.

¶5. (C) PSUV local "battalions" will meet during the weekend of April 5-6 to nominate three persons each to lead their party in their state. The regional vice-presidents will forward 60 of these nominations to the PSUV national committee on April 14. The PSUV national steering committee will then choose 15 state PSUV leaders and 15 alternates.

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Chavez plans to swear these state leaders in on April 19. According to a PSUV National Assembly staff assistant Julio Lare, the regional PSUV leaders will have considerable input in selecting PSUV candidates for the November state and local elections, subject to the central committee (read Chavez') approval.

A Slow Start

¶6. (C) Even PSUV members concede that Chavez' new political party continues to suffer from organizational problems. PSUV National Assembly member Calixto Ortega told PolCounts April 3 that the PSUV is plagued by "growing pains" and said that if it had been up to him, he never would have tried to create the new party. While asserting that the PSUV is more "horizontal" in its decision-making than other Venezuelan political parties, NA staff aide Lare nevertheless lamented that too many "opportunists" are exploiting the organization of the party to advance their individual interests. Conceding that even he is sometimes confused by the PSUV's new party structure, Lare suggested the PSUV's immediate challenge is to ensure that the PSUV becomes an effective vehicle for mobilizing voters in November.

Comment

¶7. (C) As President of the country and the PSUV, we expect Chavez will try to personally manage and direct PSUV activities, including the selection of gubernatorial and mayoral candidates. The lengthy delay in its creation is partially due to his tendency to micromanage and his lack of attention devoted to PSUV in 2007, as well as opposition from other pro-government parties to having one centrally

controlled political structure. Despite Chavez' stated intention to foster grassroots democracy in his new party, the selection of national steering committee members (Reftel), regional leaders, state leaders, and committee chairs is a decidedly top-down process. Chavez' assignment of multiple leadership roles to a number of senior leaders also underscores just how small the Venezuelan president's inner circle is. Finally, the designation by Chavez' of numerous cabinet members, governors, and National Assembly members to key party positions, as well as the creation of a state-party coordination committee, are further indications of Chavez' intention to blur the distinction between the Venezuelan government and the PSUV.

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